

2019

PERIODIC TABLE OF

EMAIL OPTIMIZATION & DELIVERABILITY

PRESENTED BY



ABOUT



Marketing Land's sister site, Search Engine Land, pioneered the highly successful Periodic Table of SEO – a guide to the essential aspects of search engine optimization that debuted in 2011.

Now, we are continuing and expanding our commitment to marketers with the Periodic Table of Email Optimization and Delivery -- a guide that tells you everything you need to know about sending emails that your subscribers want to receive.

Email is one of the most complex ways you can communicate with customers and prospects, given all of the possible ways the recipients might experience your messages -- through different mail clients, different ISPs, mobile and desktop, etc. -- and all of the possible obstacles between you and your intended recipients.

Each element in this table represents a factor that you need to consider to be successful in email marketing. The elements are gathered into categories based on their relationships to one another, and the categories are designated as related to either Optimization or Deliverability. Further down on the table, you'll see Toxins, a designation for practices that can poison your email marketing efforts, and Traps, which you'll want to be aware of.

Lastly, we've used the Experimental category to describe emerging factors that may eventually play a more significant role.

This Periodic Table provides a holistic understanding of the email marketing space as it exists in 2019. The table's content was authored by Jennifer Cannon, our senior editor, based upon her considerable experience in helping brands deliver impactful emails that reached their intended destination: the inbox.

While digital marketing is indeed an art, it is also a science. We hope this new tool serves as an essential reference for your experiments.

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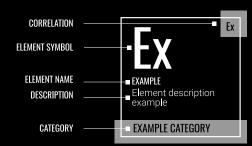
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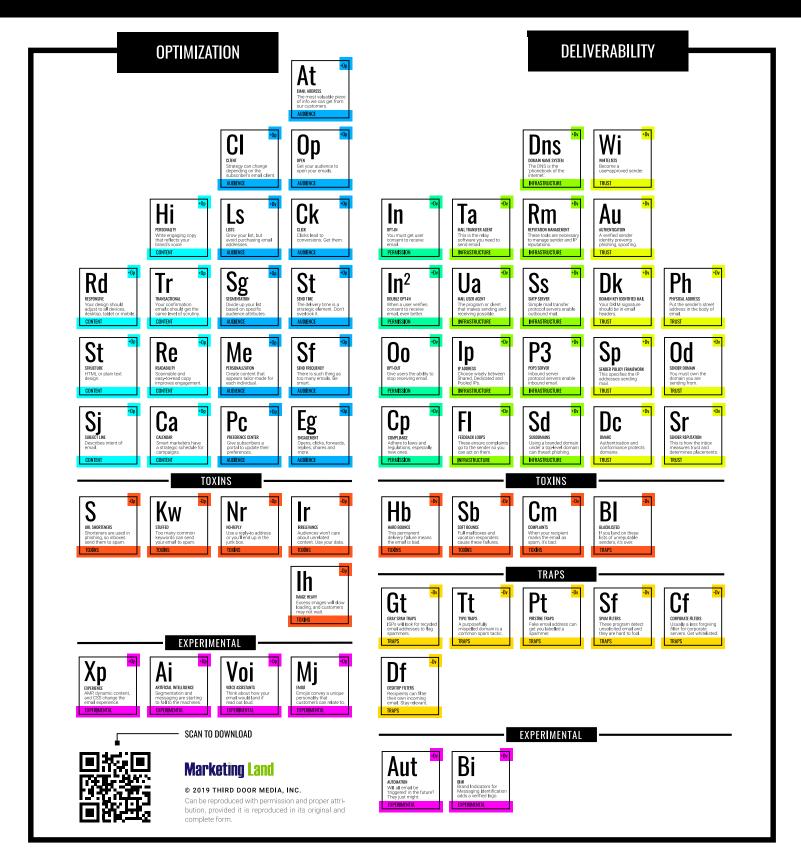
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Marketing Land

2019 PERIODIC TABLE OF EMAIL OPTIMIZATION AND DELIVERABILITY **MANAGED INBOX EDITION**

Successful email marketing is about more than clicks and opens. An email address is the most valuable piece of information we can collect from our customers. This guide to success factors, toxins and traps will help you build relationships built on trust and reach the managed inbox.





PERMISSION

01.

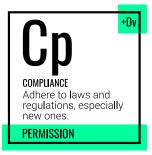
Before marketers even begin to email, they must first secure the affirmative permission of the recipients. This sets the stage for a positive relationship between the mailer and the mailee, because the customer or prospective customer has raised a virtual hand and agreed that the marketer's email will be welcome in their mailbox.

Typically, the opt-in (In) process occurs through a sign-up form, where a person submits their email with the expectation of receiving a newsletter, a white paper or some other form of communication from the sender. Double Opt-In (In²) goes a step further, requiring that subscribers click on a confirmation email sent to the address submitted. This has the advantage of collecting a second agreement from the recipient and stymies situations where people or bots input bad email addresses that don't belong to them. However, the double opt-in process may also leave some potential subscribers behind, when they neglect to respond to the confirmation email.









To maintain a positive relationship between the parties, and also to be in Compliance (Cp) with national and international regulations, senders must always provide recipients with an easy-to-find option to unsubscribe, or opt-out (Oo) at any time.

TRUST

02.

















Gaining permission sets the stage for building trust, both the trust of the recipient and the trust of their ISP, which ultimately controls which emails are delivered, which go into the spam folder and which are blocked entirely.

A number of other technical measures, designed to verify the sender of an email, fall under the blanket of Authentication (Au) and represent the basic requirements that mass-senders must fulfill to gain the trust of inbox providers. Domain Key Identified Mail (Dk), also known as DKIM, refers to mail that uses a public/private cryptography key set to verify the identity of the sender. Sender Policy Framework (Sp), or SPF, is a different authentication standard that specifies which IP addresses are authorized to send mail for a given domain. Domain-based Message Authentication and Conformance (Dc), or DMARC, aims to help brands prevent their domains from being used by other entities for malicious purposes.

Maintaining that trust also means including the Physical Address (Ph) of the entity sending the email which, according to CAN-SPAM regulation, must appear in the body of the email. A sender can also gain credibility by being placed on an inbox provider's Whitelist (Wi), a list of IP addresses and/or domains that are permitted into a particular network, allowing emails to bypass typical checks designed to quarantine emails.

Finally, the Sender Domain (Od) and Sender Reputation (Sr) elements refer to the fact that marketers need to own the domain from which they are sending emails, and that they need to develop and cultivate a good reputation with inbox providers, since that reputation for abiding by responsible practices will affect how the sender's emails are placed – in the inbox or in the spam folder – going forward.

INFRASTRUCTURE

03.

While marketers may not be in charge of their company's email infrastructure - typically the IT department handles such matters - it's critical that marketers have insight into how everything fits together so they can talk with the engineers that are configuring their email-related systems. The following elements refer to the way email is sent, routed and received through the internet.

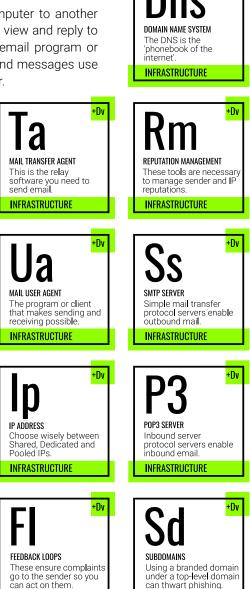
The Mail Transfer Agent (Ta) is software that transfers email from one computer to another using the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol, known as SMTP. When users receive, view and reply to email messages, they use a Mail User Agent, or UA. This is also called an email program or email client and it sometimes is used through a web-based interface. Outbound messages use an SMTP server (Ss), while inbound messages use a POP3 (P3) or IMAP server.

An IP (or Internet Protocol) (Ip) address is a number - or "address" assigned to each computer, network device or network that's connecting to and communicating through the internet. Depending on how you are sending email, you may have a dedicated IP address, which is solely your own, or a shared IP address, which you share with many other senders using the same host or email service provider. This is important because Sender Reputation is often assigned by IP address, as it's difficult to distinguish between multiple senders using a single IP address. Therefore, if you want to be in control of your own Sender Reputation, you will use a dedicated IP address so that only your own sending practices - and no one else's - can affect your Sender Reputation.

Typically, your IP address will be associated with a domain name or a subdomain (Sd) – like marketingland.com or mail.marketingland.com - through the Domain Name System (Dns). The DNS maps domain names to the IP addresses hosting the web sites and the IP addresses sending mail for, a particular entity with a particular domain name.

Having your own dedicated domain name and IP address are also important when it comes to getting feedback - through a Feedback Loop (FI) – from inbox providers about how your messages are being received by recipients. Not all inbox providers offer this service, but the larger ones do, and this feedback loop can include include data on complaints and other information that can help marketers optimize their lists and messaging. Typically, these feedback communications will go to your email service provider - the company or software you're using to send your emails.

Managing your Sender Reputation through the use of dedicated IP addresses and monitoring feedback from inbox providers are elements of Reputation Management (Rm) - tools marketers, their IT staff and their email service providers use to manage the reputation of their domains and IP addresses.



+Dv

INFRASTRUCTURE

can act on them.

INFRASTRUCTURE

AUDIENCE

04.























Finally, it's time to discuss the people you're trying to reach with your email messages – your Audience. Here we shift to the Optimization section of the Periodic Table.

The most important element of all is the Email Address (At), the unique identifier for your subscriber. This is the most valuable piece of information that we can collect. Email addresses are typically assembled into Lists (Ls) – groups of email addresses that are uploaded to distribute email messages to. Each List, however, can be divided into various cohorts – depending on the amount of data you have on them – via Segmentation (Sg). Segmentation allows marketers to choose smaller groups of customers, or potential customers, and communicate with them in a manner that is specifically tailored to their particular demographics, locations or behaviors. Personalization (Me) refers to the practice of using subscriber data to tailor-make content for individuals based upon the information you have about them.

This information can be collected and augmented through the use of an email Preference Center (Pc), which is an interface for subscribers that allows them to manage their subscription preferences. Preference Centers can be used to allow recipients to tell senders how best to serve them by expressing their interests or indicate how often they'd like to receive communications.

Beyond Preference Centers, marketers can learn a lot about subscribers' likes and dislikes by observing how they interact with messages that are sent. Recipients use an email Client (Cl) to either download their email or access their email through a web interface. The first metric marketers look at is the Open (Op), which occurs when a recipient actually opens an email. Next, marketers can look at whether users Click (Ck), or interact with a link within the email, which demonstrates their Engagement (Eg) with the content.

When marketers are analyzing their Audience's interaction with the emails they've sent, two of the metrics that often have an impact on engagement are Send Time (St), the time the email is sent (typically looked at in terms of the recipient's time zone) and Send Frequency (Sf), how often a given email address or list receives emails from the brand.

CONTENT

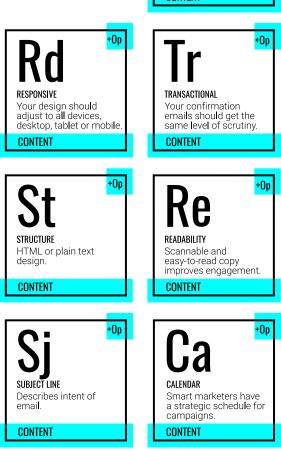
05.

Other elements that affect engagement involve the content of the email itself. First and foremost, in this age of smartphones and tablets, it's critical that your emails are designed in such a way that they are Responsive (Rd) – so they are optimized to look good on a wide variety of devices and in many different email clients. You can choose to send emails in HTML or in plain text, depending on the Structure (St) that you prefer or the purpose of the email. For example, you might choose plain text for a Transactional (Tr) email, one sent to confirm an online order or provide shipping information or otherwise facilitate an agreed upon transaction.

Whatever format you choose, you'll want to carefully craft your Subject Line (Sj), the introduction that tells the recipient about the intent of the message and encourages the person to open it. Once it's open, the email content should have a Personality (Hi), using images and text that reflect your brand, and it should strive for Readability (Re), speaking your audience's language in scannable, easy-to-read sentences and paragraphs.



THE FREQUENCY WITH WHICH YOUR EMAIL MESSAGES ARE DELIVERED ALSO HAS AN IMPORTANT EFFECT ON HOW THEY ARE RECEIVED. ADOPT A WELL-THOUGHT-OUT EMAIL MARKETING CALENDAR (CA) STRUCTURED AROUND YOUR ORGANIZATION'S MILESTONES.



TOXINS

There are a few types of content that are definite no-nos in the email marketing world. In this Periodic Table, we're including them as Toxins.

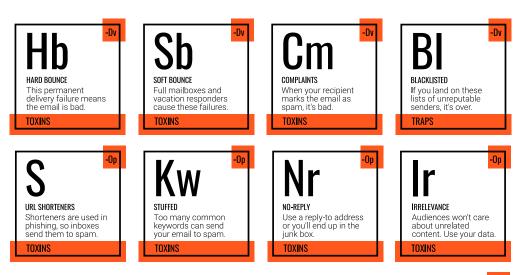


Image Heavy (Ih) emails, while not necessarily toxic as such, can cause problems when the file sizes result in slow load times. Customers may lose patience and close or delete emails if they take too long to appear. And while you may want to use a URL Shortener (S) to track people's interactions with a link, think again – because many phishing emails use these in an attempt to trick the recipient, some inbox providers send messages with shortened URLs directly to the spam box. Messages Stuffed (Kw) with keywords or from No-Reply (Nr) addresses can also be relegated to the junk folder, depending on the inbox provider and spam filtering settings. Irrelevant (Ir) content, though it's not something that inbox providers can filter for up-front, causes problems eventually – because subscribers delete, report and unsubscribe from emails they find irrelevant. And inbox providers can definitely filter based upon these negative interaction metrics.

The other toxins involve things to watch out for. Handled properly, a Hard Bounce (Hb), which indicates a permanent delivery failure, a Soft Bounce (Sb), informing the sender of a temporary delivery failure, or even a Complaint (Cm), when a user flags your message as spam, aren't necessarily problematic (though a great number of complaints can be). Just remove the complaints and hard bouncers from your lists in a timely manner and you shouldn't run into trouble. Not doing so, however, could have toxic effects.



TRAPS













Traps are methods used by inbox providers to catch spammers in the act. Steer clear or risk having all your email blocked or sent to the spam folder.

For one type of trap, the Gray Spam Trap (Gt), the ISP monitors old or deactivated accounts to identify unsolicited emailers. Typo Traps (Tt) look out for misspellings of well-known domain names, like Citiebank.com or WellesFargo.com, because these are often used in phishing schemes or ransomware attacks. Pristine Traps (Pt), sometimes called Honeypot Traps or True Traps, are email addresses that have never been used to make purchases, to subscribe to newsletters or for any other purpose. Send a message to one of these addresses and it's pretty clear you're coloring outside the lines.

Information gathered from these traps is used to develop Spam Filters (Sf), Corporate Filters (Cf) and Blacklists (Bl). The first two represent an ISP or organization's efforts to write rules to keep spam from users' inboxes. Sometimes, they employ a blacklist, often compiled by a third party, as part of their blocking protocols. The last layer of protection for an individual's inbox are their own Desktop Filters (Df), which designate whether emails should be filed, deleted or put into a spam folder, based on a users' personal preferences.

EXPERIMENTAL





Most of this Periodic Table represents tried and true methods for optimization and deliverability. However, we also want to highlight a few emerging practices that show promise.









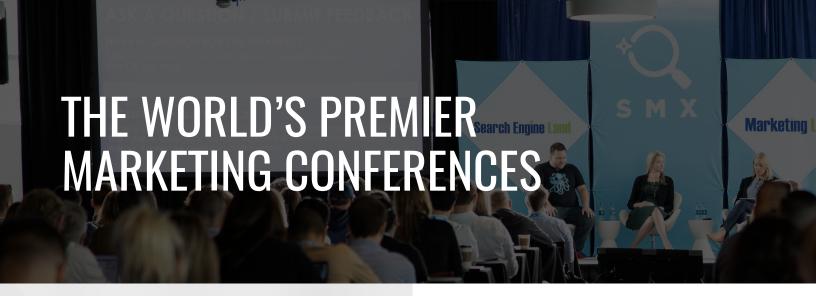
First are innovations that improve the user Experience (Xp), like AMP, dynamic content, CSS animations and advanced personalization. Artificial Intelligence (Ai) and machine learning, when used by marketers, will help them leverage data to create more compelling emails. On the ISP side, ML and AI will continue to monitor our inboxes and will get better at detecting what kind of emails our recipients want to receive.

Earlier, we mentioned the great changes the rise of the smartphone brought to the world of email. Some believe that Voice Assistants (Voi) represent the next big interface development. Have you considered what your email sounds like when read aloud?

Emoji (Mj) are another way creative marketers are adding personality and flair to their subject lines and message content.

Automation (Aut), though already in use to some extent, has the potential to impact our email practices in even greater ways. Consider what it would be like to automatically trigger an email to a prospect based on an action, or series of actions, they took on your website.

A new initiative by ISPs called BIMI (Bi) may end up having a significant impact on the inbox. Through this program, verified senders' logos appear next to their messages, reassuring recipients as to their legitimacy.







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